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SELECT COMMITTEE ON ELDER ABUSE

S. JOSEPH SIMITIAN, Chair



Combating Elder Abuse: Next Steps for California

The California State Assembly formed the Select Committee¹ on Elder Abuse in 2003 with a broad mandate to investigate and conduct hearings on the prevalence of elder abuse in the community, its causes, and preventative measures. Assemblyman Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) was appointed Chair of the Committee at its inception.

Elder abuse is a growing national and statewide problem. California, in particular, appears to be vulnerable. It is home to the largest elderly population in the country. The California Attorney General's office recently estimated that more than 225,000 cases of elder abuse occur every year in California. Because of gaps in reporting, investigation, and prosecution, the extent of elder abuse is not completely known. With California's aging population and its diminishing resources, the problem of elder abuse is expected to grow.

The Select Committee on Elder Abuse convened its first two public hearings in Northern California, addressing two forms of abuse—financial and physical—from the perspective of counties, which are by and large responsible for the prevention, investigation and prosecution of

¹ A Select Committee is a temporary committee of the legislature that is formed in response to a specific need or developing issue. The formation of these committees is subject to the approval of legislative leadership and must be renewed every session. A select committee generally holds meetings outside of the regular legislative calendar, as determined by the Chair.

elder abuse, both at the home and in institutional settings. These hearings were informational in nature, with an emphasis on proposing legislative solutions to the problem of physical or financial abuse. The public was invited to comment as well.

The first hearing in San Jose brought together stakeholders from County Aging and Adult Services and Adult Protective Services, local law enforcement and district attorneys' offices, as well as a medical expert, a nursing home reform advocate, and a nonprofit legal services representative.

The second hearing in Santa Cruz brought together similar local stakeholders as well as representatives from the California Attorney General's Office and the local ombudsman's office.

Panelists shared heartbreaking tales of elder abuse in their testimony, but they also made specific suggestions with respect to the reporting and documentation of elder abuse, education and prevention, and strengthening legal tools for prosecution. One point that came up repeatedly was the importance of teamwork between stakeholders, and the sharing of information and practices. Because elder abuse issues are healthcare issues, long-term care issues, social services issues, and justice system issues, teamwork and a shared commitment across these systems are necessary to protect seniors mentally, physically, emotionally, and financially.

The publication of this Report is intended to be a first step in recording a public dialogue and capturing our state's progress in identifying problems and proposing solutions. The problem of elder abuse will not be resolved overnight. It must be tackled over many years with a long-term

outlook in mind. The observations and suggestions contained in this Report will be the basis for legislative proposals to follow.

Readers are invited to share their feedback regarding the contents of this Report by e-mail:

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